



Focus on reintegration of ex-prisoners to the labour market

The Czech Republic suffers of high level of imprisonment - the proportion is 179 prisoners for 100 000 inhabitants whereas re-offenders make up to 60-80% of the prisoners. Among the main barriers of reintegration of ex-prisoners to job market belongs high unemployment in some regions, criminal records, low qualification, inadequate social and work habits, passivity, low motivation and reluctance of the employers to employ ex-prisoners.

The Chance project - Coalition Chance [Common Database of EQUAL Project: CZ-28](#) answers to this situation by newly developed reintegration program for persons before and after release from prison.

The aim of the project is to support this disadvantaged social group in regaining social and moral stability and to contribute to protection of the society from the re-offending. Consequently the second target group is employers whose collaboration in the realization of the project is important.

Until now 40 clients have used the services of the Chance project (incl. 4 women). The activities of the project are carried on a regional level, in two regions of the Czech Republic with specific factors (high unemployment, low opportunity to get work for people with low qualification, etc.) and in three prisons.

Participants of the project take part in courses tailored to meet their needs. The core of the program is a continuous motivation of a client to change life style after release. Participants gain information and skills in area of legal and employment issues, communication skills, opportunities of EU job market etc.

“The program can be defined as a comprehensive motivational and educational program that respects client’s needs and its main standard is a usefulness to the client. Prisoners that participate in the program with aim to really change their life style. They are willing to find a job and to re-establish trust in relationship with close persons. They are assisted systematically by project staff in their efforts. Even before their release we offer to them an opportunity to gain the information and skills they will need after release. After release we provide them above all with the assistance while looking for job and long-term motivational support during the demanding period after release that may be a major benchmark for most of our clients,“ explains the regional project coordinator.

Specially trained mentors (volunteers) work with prisoners after their release and they use their practical and theoretical knowledge in order to facilitate the clients to find a job and solve their personal situation. The contact and the assistance continue for another six months. Mentoring support is tested also for clients of Czech Probation and Mediation Service that are conditionally released with supervision and for released women.

„I am happy that I could participate in the requalification training of operation of lift-trucks here in Belusice (prison). I used to drive long-distance trucks so I know how important it is to have a written proof in my hands that I have this requalification training to find a decent job. Offer of CKD Factory presented here in the prison caught my eye,” clarifies one of the project clients.

Another client adds up: “First I did not know who is a mentor but I imagined that she/he will come to my house to control me like in a movie... I was scared... But now my mentor helped me to write down a schedule of values to pay my debts, she assists me while looking for a work and I take her more as a friend ... I think that Chance is a benefit, it is not a clerkish approach ...”

Main innovation brought by the project consists of linking services before and after release and the change of stereotypes in the field of the employment criteria.

Organizer of the project is the Coalition Chance formed by ten organizations and managed by Association for Probation and Mediation in Justice (SPJ).

The project Chance exchanges its newly gained experience within the international cooperation „Open Windows“ with partners from Netherlands (Utrechtse Held), France (ANCRE), Italy (I.P.M. DI SCENA) and Lithuania (Crossroad).

More details on international cooperation: <http://www.open-windows.net>.

Project webpages: <http://www.equal.spj.cz>